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# FOREIGN DEPARTMENT

IN CHARGE OF  
LAVINIA L. DOCK



## THE NURSING SYSTEM OF ITALIAN HOSPITALS

(Continued from page 565)

IN our last number we gave some account of the nursing system of Italy and tried to show its mediæval character and the difficulties in the way of modern nursing reforms. This month we shall try to give our readers an outline of what is being done along modern lines, and of the personalities of several nurses, who, realizing the urgent need of improvement, are laboring each in her own way to bring about a more enlightened system of nursing and a more rational environment for the nurse.

These modern nurses seem no less admirable than the reformers of the Middle Ages. Their patience, courage, and love of humanity are as great as those of the saints, and their health is better. If they are not canonized some day, at least they deserve to be.

In Florence, there is Miss Turton; in Rome, Signora Celli; in Naples, Miss Baxter. Then there are Miss Tonino and others of Miss Baxter's graduates.

Miss Turton was the pioneer in Italy. She is English, but through long residence has devoted herself to Italy. For quite a long period of years she has been striving to educate, planting seeds, getting things started, working in hospital herself, and leavening her public with the ideas of an educated and intelligent nursing service.

To revolutionize such a system as one finds in Italy, which has been supreme for a thousand years, is not done as easily as were hospital reforms in England and America, though these were difficult enough, and Miss Turton, believing—as we think, wisely—that it would be fatal to antagonize the existing order, has sought to graft the new on to the old and to introduce new ideas and methods gradually by obtaining permission from the nuns to have pupil-nurses enter the wards and pass through a course of practical work under her own and the physicians' supervision.

It seems altogether probable that in no other way could a beginning have been made—especially as no demands had come from the medical profession for a change. Had they been dissatisfied, as in France, the question might have been different, but here, with no professional or popular discontent with hospital methods, it is hardly conceivable that with less tact, or with more aggressiveness, it would have been possible to gain the foothold which was all-important at the outset.

Miss Turton, having made and held her point of vantage, and being directly occupied in Florence, saw the opportunity of securing wards in Naples, interested the right people, and sent for Miss Baxter, who had just graduated from the Johns Hopkins Hospital.

Miss Baxter was born in Italy, of English parents, and grew up in Italy. Her coming to the Johns Hopkins was one of those unpremeditated acts which

later appear so like destiny. At the very moment when she was prepared for it her work was ready for her, and she took it and has kept it to this day—the right person in the right place: a perfectly trained nurse, practical and sagacious, commanding the respect of the men and the devotion of her pupils.

In the beautiful old pink-and-yellow stuccoed General Hospital of Naples—one of the prettiest of all the cloister hospitals—she has built up a real training-school for nurses, the only thing of the kind to be found in Italy. The pupils are educated gentlewomen, and their earnestness is shown in the fact that they receive no compensation whatever from the hospital, but live entirely at their own expense, with the sole exception of a daily luncheon in the hospital. Their thorough teaching and genuine work are worthy of their teacher's Alma Mater.

Here, for the first time in Italy, one sees well-kept adult *patients*. Not only are the wards orderly and well-managed, but the patients are cared for through and through, and this makes the contrast with other large hospitals most striking.

This school is now in its ninth year, has thirty-five graduates, twenty-five of whom are in active duty and very successful, and is firmly established in the appreciation of the medical staff. Beginning with one ward, it now nurses seven, and only those who have visited Italy can realize the patience and ability necessary to attain this result, which to us may seem small for such a length of time.

Signora Celli, in Rome, is also a trained nurse, having the diploma of the great General Hospital of Hamburg, one of the largest and most modern in Germany, where a most extensive and varied service is to be had and where discipline and professional standards are very high. She has been married for some few years to Professor Angelo Celli, of Rome, who has done so much work in malaria and who is now, as a member of the Italian Parliament, working for legislation to enforce methods of prophylaxis against malaria.

Madame Celli has assisted her husband in much of his work, going through the Roman Campagna, taking blood specimens and making counts, and noting the results of the "control" experiments. They are both ardent social reformers as well as thoroughly professional, and he is as much interested in her nursing questions as she is in his scientific work. In her opinion it will be possible to interest many young teachers, for whom there are now not enough positions, in nursing as a profession.

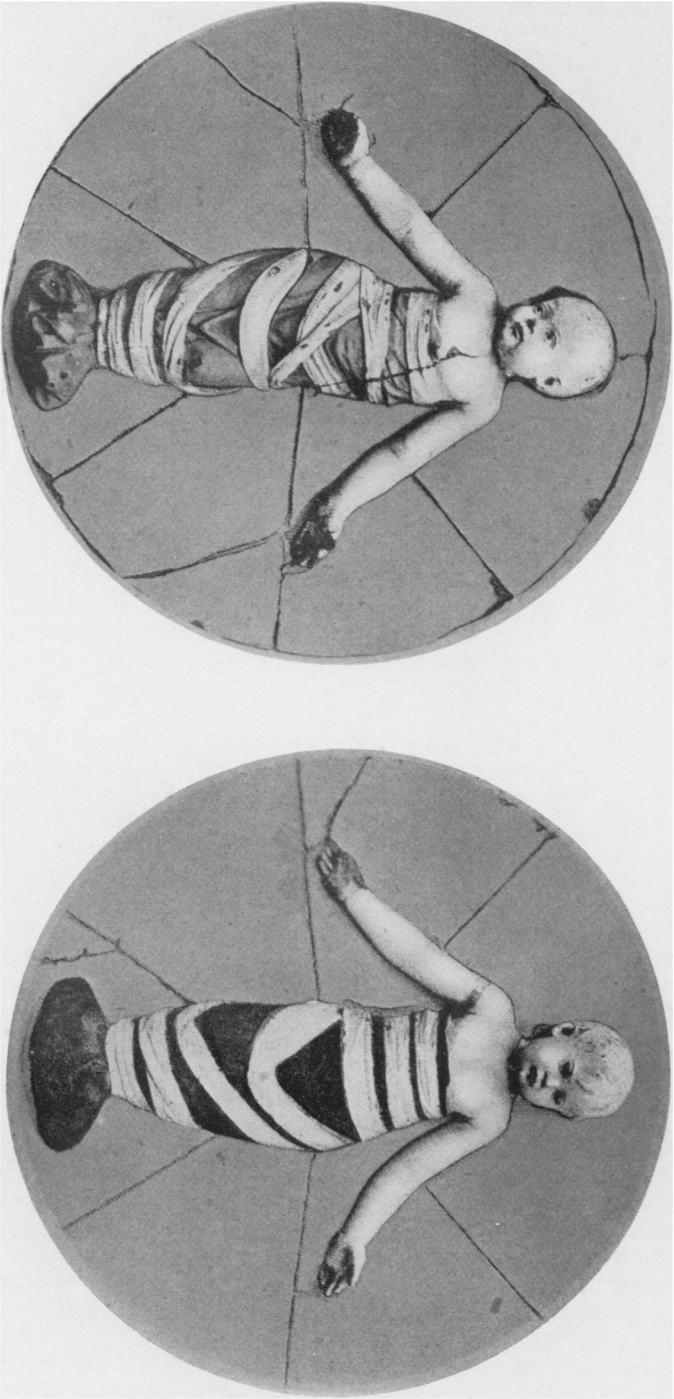
Madame Celli has also made extensive studies of the conditions of the "nurse-servants" and has written articles on the same, from which we hope to quote later and which will show her opinions.

The condition of the children of the poorest classes also appeals strongly to them both, and Professor Celli has written a pamphlet describing the wretchedness of the peasants of the Campagna.

It will throw some light on the difficulties of the work before the Cellis to know that by conservative Italians of the older régime they are looked upon as dangerous innovators, only to be spoken of with bated breath.

Miss Tonino, one of Miss Baxter's graduates, and a most charming young Italian, full of intelligence and of a firm and courageous nature, has been working for five years in Rome in one of the large general hospitals, where nuns are in full charge.

She is permitted to train a class of her own pupils in these wards; but without proper facilities for teaching, without power to regulate work, without responsibility for the sick, and being there only, as it were, on sufferance, I



MEDALLIONS ON FRONT OF FOUNDLING HOSPITAL



FOUNDLING HOSPITAL IN FLORENCE. LOGGIA ON COURT

must say the effort seemed to me quite hopeless. While at the outset this may have been the only way, it now seems impossible to make any further advance while so restricted. It is a clear case of new wine in old bottles. Until the nurses can have wards to themselves as Miss Baxter has, they will not be able to give the object-lesson or make the impression which could be made by a sharp contrast.

It will be seen, however, that the beginnings of a new order have been made in Italy, and one must wish it all success. The Italian nature is so lovable and the Italian heart so warm that these young women should be ideal nurses when education is added to their other gifts.

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## LETTERS

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### VISITS TO ITALIAN HOSPITALS

(Continued from page 567)

ANOTHER most charming Italian hospital is the Ospedale degli Innocenti, in Florence. It is really a home for foundlings, managed on a scientific basis and with provision for sick and premature babes.

As some of the Italian hospitals are open to much criticism, I shall describe some of the good ones first, and the hospitals of Florence seem to be very well kept and managed, both from the medical and general standpoint.

The Foundlings Hospital is managed by Sisters of Charity, and the babes have foster-mothers, except, of course, such as are ordered artificial feeding by the physicians.

It would be hard to find a place of the kind more immaculately and beautifully kept, or babes more exquisitely cleanly and sweet from the skin out. Their beds were spotless all through, and we inspected them down to the mattress.

The wards are very attractive, the beds being oval baskets like those of the Infirmary in New York, but supported on an iron upright and small frame instead of brackets. All clean diapers were kept in a hot-air closet in the wall.

In a large dressing-room was a big, square table, and in the middle of it was a fountain fixture with faucet, worked by pedals underneath, surgical wash-stand fashion, from which flowed, when needed, a stream of warm boracic-acid solution. The table was padded and covered with rubber sheeting, and sloped on all sides towards the centre, where the stream drained off. Beside the fountain stood a jar of pledgets of cotton for the eyes. It seemed to me as excellent a bit of detail as I had ever seen. I think too I have never seen anywhere a more generous amount of cubic airspace per bed than was allowed to these babies.

The floors of this hospital were of dark-red, square, brick tiles, filled in some way so as to be quite smooth. The buildings are rather old, but charming architecturally, with the Lucca della Robbia plaques on the front, and with the large central court.

I confess it was a mystery to me just how this institution was, apparently, so faultlessly kept. If the foster-mothers and servant-nurses actually do the work under the supervision of the sisters, then they both deserve compliments. It appeared too as if the physicians must be very exact in their requirements, and as if a good deal of the credit must be due to them for the details.

There, of course, are all the details of asepsis in the care of eyes, and the

very minute and thorough methods practised for avoiding specific infections, of which Miss Turton told me.

An admirable modern hospital in Florence is the Ospedale Meyer for Children. It is built on the single pavilion plan, the pavilions being connected by a broad, glass-walled corridor. The service includes all branches, the infectious pavilions standing in a group by themselves on the large grounds. The operating-rooms and surgical dressing-rooms are well-planned and are in conformity with the requirements of a strict asepsis.

Besides steam sterilization they prepare dry, sterile absorbent cotton in a way that was new to me. They use a large, double iron pan, something like a big waffle-iron, but smooth. The cotton layers go in this and the cover clamps down, and the cotton is baked to a light brown color. There are fine clinical and pathological laboratories, rooms for microscopy, photography, and bacteriological work in this hospital. They have X-rays, and a well-fitted up gymnasium for orthopædic cases, with appliances for passive and active exercises. They use the Lorenz method a great deal with excellent results.

The pavilions for infections are simple and well-planned. Patients, clothing, and attendants go in at one side and come out clean and disinfected by regular stages at the opposite end.

Through Miss Turton's kindness I saw this hospital under the guidance of the resident physicians, young men whose extreme courtesy and enthusiasm in their work made the visit especially delightful.

The housekeeping side of this hospital was also very attractive. The kitchen is a fascinating one, clean and shining, with all manner of quaint devices in brass and copper and wrought-iron. The linen of the house was beautiful, the doctors' white gowns even having embroidered initials worked by the nuns, and in the wards when the children were having their lunch I noticed a diet that seemed to me highly commendable—namely, broth with a fresh raw egg stirred into it just before taking.

I did not succeed in getting to the Obstetrical Hospital, which is said to be so admirable.

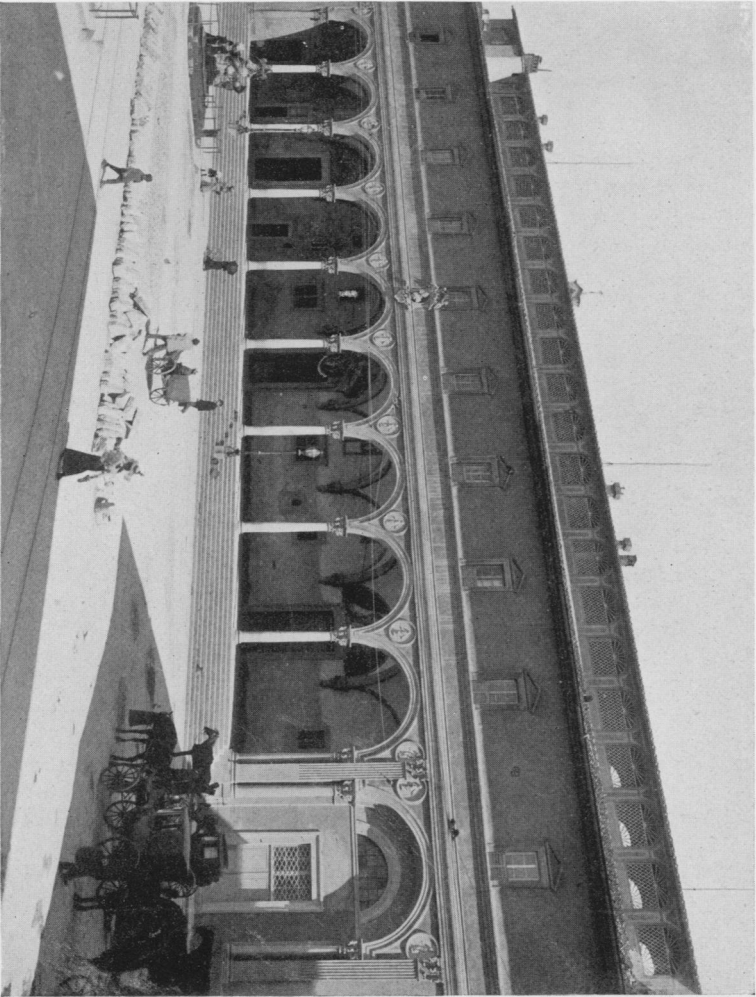
Florence is full of Mediæval nursing history. The old hospital mentioned in "*Romola*," where *Romola* used to go to visit her patients, is still standing, but now converted into the Accademia di Belle Arti.

Among its pictures is a quaint representation of the two medical saints, Damian and Cosmas, setting a broken leg, and on one of the walls is a fresco showing hospital scenes in the same building in the fifteenth century. (See illustration.) This fresco is now covered by a painting which the guard will move on request.

According to these old frescoes, the Italian hospitals of the Middle Ages at least gave their patients a bed each, being superior in this respect to the old French hospitals with three or four patients in one bed. Damian belonged to the Medici family (Medici—physician), and no one can be in Florence without becoming familiar with the Medici coat-of-arms with its six huge pills on the shield.

Another historical spot is the Bigallo, on the Cathedral Square, a beautiful, open loggia where abandoned babies used to be laid. Next to it is a building occupied by a religious order whose work it was to take the foundlings left in the Bigallo.

Then one sees to this day the Brothers of the Misericordia going through the streets, dressed in black with a black mask over the face. In Rome they



**FOUNDLING HOSPITAL IN FLORENCE. FRONT, SHOWING MEDALLIONS**





FRESCO ON WALL OF S. MARIA DELLA SCALA, SIENA

wear white. They were instituted as a sort of "First Aid" service, and really constituted a substitute for an ambulance corps. In the histories of Mediæval Florence they are spoken of as if young men living at home took turns in responding to calls for this service, their duties being to carry the sick to hospital, to transport the bodies of the dead, and the like. They are also still sent for, I am told, in private cases to *turn* or *lift* the sick! In Florence we met a flock of them, taking a dead body for interment, all dressed in black with only their eyes showing. At night, carrying torches, they are even more weird-looking. In olden times the monks kept open house in hospices at the various city gates. The sick and wounded falling by the wayside were brought to them and tended by the monks until the brothers of the Misericordia could be called to carry them to the hospitals within the city.

Before leaving Florence, do just look in at the drug-house of Molteni & Co., on the Piazza Signoria, and see the beautiful old majolica urns in which the drugs are kept. They are a perfect picture, standing in rows up to the ceiling.

In Rome I saw another interesting relic of Mediæval hospital custom in the works of the Third Order of St. Francis.

Going through the hospital La Consolazione one day with Miss Sara MacDonald we came to a woman's ward. The usual "infirmière," or nurse-servant, was sweeping the tiled floor with wet sawdust, and the nun in charge, with sweet, serene face, was knitting as she moved about surveying the ward (although it was the morning hour, when there is much work to be done), when to our surprise our eyes fell upon a lady, evidently, with her hat on but enveloped in a big surgeon's apron, who was most busily and energetically at work over a patient. She bathed her face, neck, and hands (there are no screens in Italian hospitals, so everything can be seen), combed and arranged her hair, brushed out the bed, and carried off the basin of water to the lavatory.

With American curiosity we asked the sister if this was a relation of the sick woman, thinking this might be a solution of how the patients are done up, which is a mystery. The sister said no, she was a lady who came to do these things for the patients.

The lady, now being through her task, appeared divested of her apron, and was joined by another. Our curiosity now became too strong, and as foreigners are allowed all sorts of liberties, we addressed them in our best Italian, asking to be told about their work.

They were most courteous and responsive, telling us that they were members of the Third Order of St. Francis, which he instituted for people who live at home and cannot join regular monastic orders. They have fixed days for visiting certain wards and performing these services for patients. Some go on one day, and others on another.

We asked if there were similar work in the men's wards, and they said yes, that even princes took their turn in going to the hospitals; they trim the men's hair, wash them, cut their finger-nails, and do all kinds of little services. This seemed to us a most quaint and old-timey custom to find in the twentieth century.

A great, old, historic hospital is the Santa Maria della Scala in Siena, where St. Catherine did her prodigies of nursing work in the times of the plague. Before that she had become famous by caring for loathsome cases of leprosy and cancer that no one else would touch. La Scala is a hospital of about two hundred beds, standing just opposite the Cathedral. In early times, besides receiving the sick, it took in and educated foundlings, lodged pilgrims,

and distributed alms. Lucy Olcott, in her little book, "A Guide to Siena," says of it:

"It is now generally accepted that the hospital owed its origin to the eleventh century. It was established by the canons of the Duomo, who then lived together like monks and were obliged to devote a part of their revenue to the assistance of the poor. In time the governing power passed from their hands into those of the laity. Like the Duomo . . . the Spedale can boast a long history of its own. For centuries it served as a lodging for pilgrims as well as an asylum for the sick and poor.

"The names of two of Siena's greatest saints are intimately connected with its history—St. Catherine, who here made her daily and nightly rounds among the sick and dying, and San Bernardino, who, together with his companions, distinguished himself by his heroic care of the plague-stricken during the terrible pestilence of 1400. . . ."

The wards are long, containing about sixty beds each, and are entered from a great hall of noble dimensions, on the walls of which are frescoes representing scenes in the history of the hospital. (See illustration.) The wards themselves are rather bare and cheerless-looking, although the beds seemed good and comfortable and well-made.

The characteristic feature of these old Italian hospitals, which were formerly monasteries, is that the ceilings are enormously high beyond all proportion to the size of the ward, and the windows very high up, sometimes just under the ceiling. The height of bare wall above the beds is such that one receives the impression that there are no windows in the ward. Yet there is plenty of light, and it is possible to have plenty of ventilation. This, however, does not always follow. No doubt for hot Italian weather this makes a far more comfortable ward than our plan, but it looks to us quite strange and rather dreary.

In going through these various old wards one cannot but feel everywhere the entire absence of *real nursing*, no matter how charming the picturesque side may be. So long as the patients do not seem seriously ill, it is not so bad, but when one encounters typhoids, pneumonias, and other grave and critical cases, then all the inadequacy of this antiquated and untrained care becomes most painfully apparent.

The worst-appearing hospitals I saw from the nursing standpoint were the great General at Milan and the three largest hospitals of Rome. In these the crowding was greater and one saw more seriously ill patients. Everything looked slovenly, half or altogether dirty, and discouraging, as if there were mountains of work piled ahead which would never be caught up with. Especially in an early morning visit, before things have been straightened up, one realizes how dreadful the conditions must be through the night. True, before training-schools were started our own city and county hospitals were worse yet, and we may still have some in remote corners that are as bad, where the trained nurse has not entered.

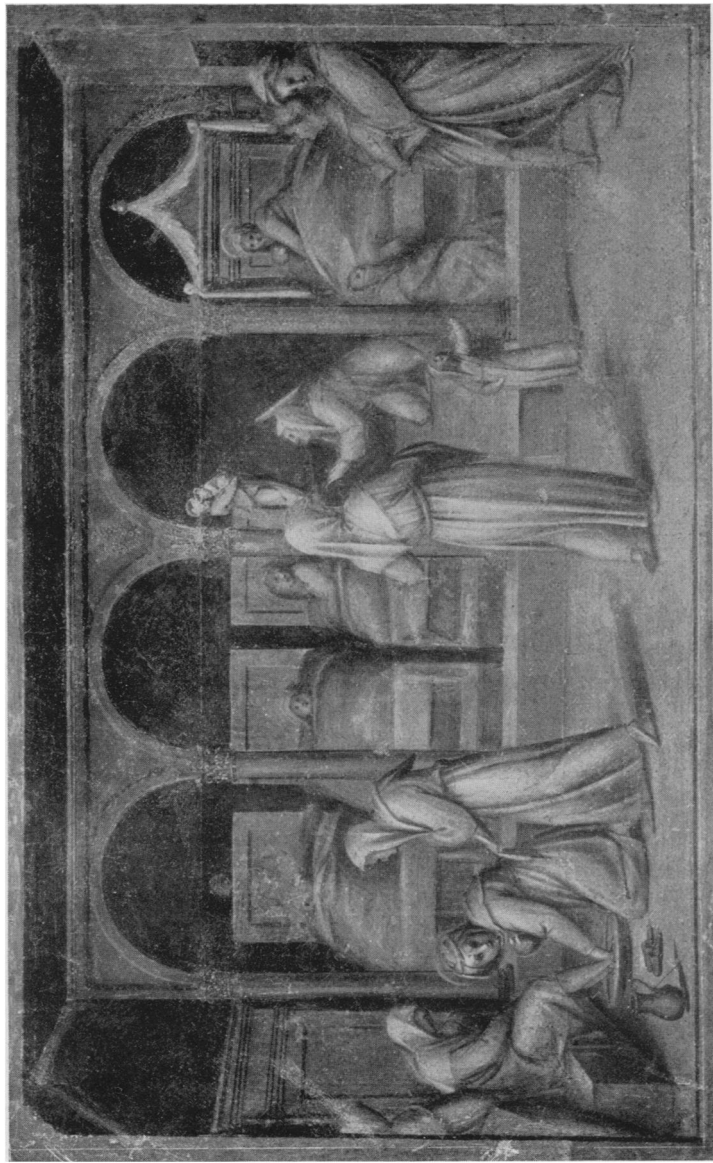
The nuns in these gigantic hospitals looked worn and haggard, and I do not doubt that they are all overtaxed, even although nothing is properly done.

It is certainly a mystery to me how the physicians and surgeons get good results in these hospitals, and how they can be willing to go on in that way. In one ward we saw poultices being made which looked like very bad mortar, and in another ward a dressing-case with instruments, appliances, and stimulants was positively pathetic in its unconscious dirt.

L. L. D.



THE CARE OF FOUNDLINGS. FRESCO ON WALL OF S. MARIA DELLA SCALA, SIENA



FRESCO ON WALL OF ANCIENT HOSPITAL, NOW ACCADEMIA DI BELLE ARTI, FLORENCE